

Citizen concerned with lease

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

I attended a recent meeting of the RRWCD. I had three items to present. One, I wanted the District's position on the Cure targeted CREP since it was stopped. I asked if the RRWCD was going to try to overturn USDA's position. It took Mr. Coryall a little time to answer, but he finally said they were not going to proceed with doing anything. It's on the record now. Keep Mr. Davis out of Washington.

The second issue was the lease back of the water from the RRWCD. I was so focused on the targeted CREP I let the water lease bypass me.

That war lasted over two years and thousands of dollars in time, expenses, plus going to Washington, D.C. But we won. Thanks again for help from so many people all across the Republican Basin. But the RRWCD spent thousands of your tax dollars traveling all over the basin, plus labor and trips to Washington, D.C. pushing the targeted CREP, that's the sad part.

When I went to the RRWCD to get the amount of the lease back from the RRWCD and a copy of the lease from the courthouse, I could not believe what I was reading. I searched along the Front Range and several places in eastern Colorado on the value of water for agricultural use, and it ranged from \$117 to \$185 per acre foot.

Matt Vincent supplied two studies from two universities to the district meeting for the record on price of water. I asked Mr. Coryall where he got the numbers for the lease back from the Cures. He said the dollar amount was based on other leases between owners and municipalities.

Mr. Coryall, prove your numbers in writing, where they come from, and I will do the same.

If we use 8,500 acres times my figure of \$125/acre, the RRWCD should receive \$1,062,500 for year 2010, but instead they received only \$1,000. Can you believe that? In 2011 they received \$474,354.42, and in 2012 they received \$481,469.73 for a total of \$956,824.14 for the three years. Using a fair market value of that water, they should have taken in \$3,187,500.

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The RRWCD just lost \$2,230,676 of income in the last three years. It gets even better; that lease is for 17 years, unless Kansas agrees to the pipeline and the Sandhills Water District demands 100 percent of any water from pipeline must go toward Compact Compliance.

I asked them to change the lease contract. Mr. David Robbins, district attorney, said 100 percent of the board voted to approve the lease and the lease is what it is.

The district has a \$50 million asset in water and is charging half of fair market rental value. Give me a break. Mr. Coryall made a response to Matt Vincent's point about higher land values that the district likely saved a large amount of money by buying the water in 2009 when prices were much lower, but the district did not allow for the increase in water value in the lease.

The water lease is locked in for the next 17 years at the 2009 price unless Kansas and the Sandhills Water District come to the table then the lease will stop. The district supposedly saved money by buying water in 2009 and threw a few million away by a cheap lease. It does not make sense.

The Yuma Pioneer in the Oct. 18 issue wrote that board Member Wayne Skold said people are losing sight of the reason the district purchased the water in the first place was to come into compliance with the Republican River compact, not to make any money. Unbelievable.

A group of us do not want to walk away on this lease issue. Let me know what you think. Call me at 970-848-3411 or e-mail: mgmekelburg@plains.net.

I was in the RRWCD office recently getting some information and was told if I did not stop writing these articles they would probably stop giving me any more information. Do you believe that?

The opinions shared within this article are solely that of Milton (Bud) Mekelburg, concerned citizen.

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